

Jane Cable

By
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Author of "Beverly
of Graustark," Etc.

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CHAPTER XVII.

TWO days passed before David Cable was permitted to see his wife. During those trying hours he lived an age of agony in suspense. She had been removed to her home late on the night of the "hold-up," as the newspapers felt justified in calling it. He did not go to his office the next day nor the next, but haunted her door, sleepless, nervous, held close by dread. A dozen times at least he sought admittance to her room, but was always turned away, cursing the doctor and the nurses for their interference.

His worst fear, however, was that his wife would not forgive him. Not the dread of exposure nor his own shame or remorse, not even the punishment that the law might inflict, could be compared to the fear of what might be her lifelong hatred. He grew to feel that the doctor, the nurses, the servants, looked upon him with strange, unfriendly though respectful eyes. In his heart he believed that his wife had cursed him in their presence, laying bare his part in the unhappy transaction.

At last the suspense became unbearable. He had noticed a slight change in Jane's manner and at once attributed it to something his wife had said, for Jane had been allowed in the sick room. The discovery that she was not his child had not as yet struck deep into his understanding. In a vague sort of way he realized that she was different, now that he knew, but it was impossible for him to consider her in any other light than that of the years gone by. The time would come when the full realization would cut into his heart more deeply than now, but at present a calamity of his own making was forcing all other troubles into the background. His greatest desire was to reach his wife's side, to know the worst that could come of his suit for forgiveness.

The evening of the second day he swore that he would see her—and alone. They admitted him, and he entered trembling in every nerve. She was lying, white and haggard, in her bed, her back toward him. He paused for an instant and was certain that he saw her shudder violently. It was significant. She feared and loathed him.

"Is it you, David?" he heard her ask weakly. "At last! Oh, I was afraid that something had happened to you! That!"

He threw himself on his knees beside the bed and wept with all the pent up bitterness and misery that was in him—and still he was afraid to speak to her. Not a word left his lips until he felt her hand in his hair—a tender, timid hand. It was then that he began pouring forth his cry for forgiveness. With a groan he checked her own appeal for mercy.

"We can talk about Jane another time, not now," he cried. "I must



He threw himself on his knees beside the bed.

know that you forgive me. I don't care for anything—nothing else in the world."

When the nurse came in a few minutes later he was sitting upon the edge of the bed holding her hands in his. Their faces were radiant.

"Please stay out," he said, almost gruffly.

"For just a little while," his wife added gently. The nurse hesitated a moment and then left the room.

Frances Cable told him Jane's history so far as it was known to her. He listened dully.

"She will never know her true parents," said she in the end.

"No, I suppose not," said he, looking out of the window.

"Understand, don't you, David, dear," she said feebly. "How I dreaded to have you learn the truth about all these years, and, above all, how I hoped that Jane might never know! I tried every means in my power to

bury James Bansemers's silence." She buried her head shamefully in her arms. After a moment she went on: "He professes to love his son, but his is the love an animal gives the offspring it would destroy. And yet Graydon worships him."

"Are you quite sure that Graydon is as unsuspecting as you think?"

"In regard to his father?"

"In regard to Jane?"

"Oh, I'm sure of it. He is not a party to his father's schemes. If James Bansemers has not already told Graydon, he never will. It is not his plan to do so. His only object has been to browbeat me into submission. David, it will all come out right in the end, won't it? You'll forgive me?"

"Yes, dear, but this man," and David Cable shook with emotion as he spoke, "will have to answer to me. There will be no more to fear," he said reassuringly. "I'll crush him as I would a snake."

"David, you must not!"

"Don't worry," he broke in. "I'll attend to him and see that no harm comes to any one else. That man has no business among honest people."

"But, David, I was not honest with you," she confessed.

"That was a long time ago, and she's as much mine as she is yours. So, what's the odds now? It's a fact, I'll admit, but it can't be helped." It was thus that the man whose anger only a few hours before had led him almost to crime now readily absolved her of any blame.

"Poor child, poor child!" she moaned. "It will break her heart. She is so proud and so happy."

"Yes, she's proud. There is good blood in her. I don't wonder now that I used to think she was such a marvel. She's—she's not just the same sort of stock that we are, take it as you will."

"She never must know the truth, David."

"She's bound to find it out, dear. We'd better tell her. It will be easier for her. Bansemers's fangs must be made harmless forever. He shan't bother her. She'd better hear the story from us and not from him."

"But Graydon? She'll lose him, David."

"I'm not so sure of it. She's worthy of any man's love, and we must know that Graydon loves her. I'll trust to that. But, first of all, we must put it beyond the power of James Bansemers to injure her in any shape or form. Then, when I go after him—Graydon or no Graydon—he'll know that there is such a place as hell."

"Be rational, David. Let us take our time and think well, dear. I can't bear the thought of the story that will go out concerning me—how I deceived you about Jane for years and years. What will people think of me? What will they say?" she almost wailed.

"Frances," said he, his voice tense and earnest, "that is between you and me. I intend to say to the world, if occasion demands, that I have known from the first that Jane was not our child. That will be!"

"Oh, David, you can't say that," she cried joyously.

"I shall say it, dear old partner. I shall say that you took her from the asylum with my consent. There is only James Bansemers to call me a liar, and he will not dare!"

"That old man Droom, David—his clerk. The man who saved me—he knows."

"He is in the boat with his master. He did save you, though. I'll spare him much for that. And I have more to fear from him than you think. Frances, I am sure he saw me night before last down there at the sea wall. He knows, I am morally certain, that you were not attacked by a robber."

"But, David, I was robbed. My rings and my pendant were taken by some one. If Droom was the first man at my side—after you—then he must have taken them."

"I can't charge him with the theft," groaned Cable. "He saved your life and he might ruin mine. I would give anything I have to know just how much he saw of the affair. I can't account for his presence there. It seems like fate."

"It is impossible for him to accuse you, David."

"It is not impossible, I'm afraid. He may have seen me plainly."

"But I have described my assailant to the police. You do not answer the description in any particular."

In the next ten minutes the nurse came in twice to caution him against overtaxing her nerves, politely hinting that he should depart at once. There was no medicine, no nursing, no care that could have done her so much good as this hour with her husband.

"It hurt me more than I can tell you, David, when I saw that you were jealous of him. I could see it growing in you day after day, and yet I could not find the courage to make everything clear to you. Oh, how could you have suspected me of that?"

"Because I am a man and because I love you enough to care what becomes of you. I was wrong, I am happy to confess. Forgive me, dear. I can't tell you how terrible the last month has been to me. I can't tell you of the bit-

ter thoughts I have had nor the vicious deeds I have planned. I was almost insane. I was not accountable. I have much to pay to you in the rest of the years that I live; I have much to pay to my own conscience, and I also owe something to James Bansemers. I shall try to pay all these different debts in the coin that they call for."

"We owe something, you and I, to Jane," said she as he arose to leave the room.

"A confession and more love than ever, Frances. I love her with all my heart. When you are stronger we will tell her that she is not our child. We have loved her so long and so well that she can't ask for better proof of our devotion. That terrible thing at the sea wall must remain our secret, dear. Tomorrow I shall begin pulling James Bansemers's fangs."

He found Graydon downstairs with Jane. A sharp look into the young man's eyes convinced him that his questions concerning Mrs. Cable and the latest news concerning the efforts to take the bandit were sincere. Cable held his hand for a long time; the firm, warm grasp was that of an honest man. As he stepped out into the night for a short walk over town he wondered, with a great pain in his heart, if Graydon Bansemers would turn from Jane when he heard the truth concerning her.



CHAPTER XVIII.

"I T'S Harbert," said Elias Droom.

"Why didn't you say to him that I am busy? I don't want to see him," said his employer in a sharp undertone. Droom's long finger was on his lips, enjoining silence.

"He said that you wouldn't want to see him, but that it didn't make any difference. He'll wait, he says."

They were in the private office, with the door closed. Bansemers's face was whiter and more firmly set than ever. The ugly fighting light was in his eyes again.

"If he has come here to threaten me, I'll kill him," he said savagely.

"You'll do nothing of the kind," said the clerk, with what was meant to be a conciliatory smile. "Meet him squarely and hear what he has to say."

"Do you suppose she has told Cable? He may have sent Harbert here."

"Cable's hands are tied. I know too much. If I were to tell the police what I know he'd have a devil of a time getting the presidency of his road. Besides, they both owe me a vote of thanks. Didn't I have sense enough to make it look like robbery?"

"Yes, but curse your stupidity, they may charge you with the job. Nobody would believe that Cable would attempt to rob his own wife."

"But they would in any event decide that he had taken the rings to make it appear like robbery." There was a hard rap on the glass panel. "He's bound to see you, sir."

"Well, then, show him in!" snarled Bansemers.

"Mr. Bansemers will see you, sir," said Droom suavely, opening the door suddenly.

"Thanks," said Harbert shortly. He entered the private office and faced the lawyer, who was standing near his desk. "I've taken advantage of your invitation to drop in and see you."

"This is one of my busy days, Mr. Harbert," said Bansemers, determined to come to the point at once. "However, I hardly expected a social call from you, so it must be of a business nature. What is it?"

"It concerns your son, Mr. Bansemers. I'm here in the capacity of a physician. You must go away for his health." Harbert smiled as though he thought it a good joke. Bansemers turned red and then white.

"I don't quite appreciate your wit, sir."

"My humor, I'd suggest as a substitute. Well, to be perfectly plain, sir, your son does not know the true nature of the malady. He—"

"Do I understand you to say that he really has an ailment?" exclaimed Bansemers seriously.

"It isn't hopeless, my dear sir. My only desire is to keep him from ever finding out that he has a malady. He is sure to learn the truth if you remain here."

"Harbert, I understand you now, and I want to say this to you: I'll not drag that boy away from this city. He's successful here, and he's one of the most promising young men in town. I'm not going to have him

hounded from town to town by—"

"You don't quite understand me, sir. On the contrary, he should remain here. What I do mean to say is this: He won't feel like staying here if the truth about his father is uttered. That's the brutal way to put it, Bansemers, but you've got to get out."

The two glared at each other for a full minute. Bansemers was as white as a sheet, but not with fear.

"Harbert," he said in low tones, "I've half a mind to kill you."

"Don't. You'd hang for it. There are at least a dozen members of the bar who know that I have come here to see you, and they know why too. See here, Bansemers, you're a scoundrel to begin with. You've always been a knave. How you happen to have a son like Graydon I can't imagine. Bansemers, I believe that I drove you out of New York. You escaped without exposure simply because the witnesses lost their nerve. That won't be the case here. You think you've covered your tracks nicely. You haven't! You've tripped into half a dozen traps! I don't know what your game is with the Cables, but you're base enough to take advantage of your son's position in that home. Don't interrupt! I'll soon be through. I'm a man of few words. If it were not for your son I'd swear out the warrants for you to-day on five different charges. For his sake I'm going to give you a chance. I've worked on you for three years. I swore I'd get you some time. Well, I've got you, and I'm going to cheat myself out of a whole lot of pleasure. I'm not going to smash you as I intended. Your son's friends have prevailed."

"To show you that I am not bluffing, I have every bit of evidence in the Burkenday case, the Flossie Bellamy job, the Widow Hensmith affair—and it was a damnable one, too—with two or three more. You broke that woman's heart. I don't suppose you know that she died last month. You never noticed it, eh? Her precious coachman is living like a lord on the money you and he took from her. Old Burkenday's housemaid has bought a little home in Edgewater—but not from her wages. The two 'obs you now have on hand never will be pulled off. The girl in the Banker Watts case has been cornered and has confessed. She is ready to appear against you. McLennan's wife has had the courage to defy your accomplice—that dastardly butler of theirs, and he has left town, frightened out of his wits. Your time has come. The jig is up. It won't be as it was in New York, because we have the proof. There is a committee of three down in Rigby's office now waiting for me to report. If I take word to them that you expect to sail for Europe next week, never to return to this country, all well and good. It is for your son's good health, bear in mind. If you go, the public may never learn the truth about you. If you stay, you will be in jail before you are a week older. And, Mr. Bansemers, you've got to decide quick."

Bansemers looked his accuser straight in the eye, a faint smile of derision touching his lips, but not his eyes.

"Mr. Harbert, the first thing you have to learn in connection with your patient's father is that he is not a coward. I refuse to run, sir. I am innocent of any intentional wrong, and I'll stand my ground. My son will stand beside me, too. He is that sort. Go back to your committee and tell them that Bansemers will not go to Europe for his son's health. Good day, sir!"

"Nonsense, Bansemers!" exploded Harbert. "You know we've got you fast enough. Why be a fool as well as a knave? You haven't a ghost of a chance. I'm trying to do you a good turn."

"A good turn? Mr. Harbert, I am neither a fool nor a knave. If I were a fool, I'd kill you where you stand. I would be justified in killing the man who represents a crowd of blackmailers. That's what you are, sir. I refuse to pay your price. If I were a knave, I'd pay it. I want you to understand one thing. I shall stand my ground here. If you persecute me I'll not stop flaying you until death ends my endeavors. We'll see what justice can give me in exchange for your bulldozing. I will have restitution, remember that. Now, you've nothing more to say to me. Get out!"

"Get out!"

"By George, you're a wonderful bluff."

"Do you expect me to throw you out, sir?"

"Get out!"

"By George, you're a wonderful bluff."

"Do you expect me to throw you out, sir?"

TO BE CONTINUED

The Character He Selected.

The great novelist Charles Dickens once received an invitation to a Walter Scott party, each guest being expected to attend in the character of one or other of Scott's heroes. On the eventful night when the Rob Roys and the Quentin Durwards were all assembled Dickens, quite unconcerned, walked in dressed in his ordinary evening clothes. At length the host, who was feeling uneasy, came to him and said, "Mr. Dickens, what character of Scott's are you supposed to represent?"

"Character," said Dickens. "Why, sir, a character you will find in every one of Scott's novels. I," he went on, smiling—"I am the 'gentle reader.'"

London Standard.

Caller—What's the matter, old man? Has anything happened? Host (groaning)—Oh, nothing; only when I was called upon at the club for my maiden speech last night I began, "As I was sitting on my thought a seat struck me," and spoiled everything!—Exchange.

The Rule of Three.

Stella—What is the rule of three? Bella—That one ought to go home.—New York Sun

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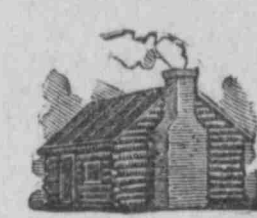
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X